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THE DECLINE IN THE BIRTH RATE.

BY FREDERICK L. HOFFMAN.

IT is time for the nation to realize the pressing need of a qualified and thorough investigation of the whole question of population and natural increase, with special reference to the physical condition and reproductive power of the native-born of native stock. While there has been some academic discussion of this problem, there has been no authoritative expression of opinion, and there exists no extensive collection of facts which would warrant a final conclusion as to present-day tendencies and ultimate results. The decennial Census reports, it is true, contain a very considerable amount of useful information; but the all-important question of the natural rate of increase among the different elements of native or foreign extraction has been practically ignored. While the opinion is almost universal that the native-born of native stock are not reproducing themselves at anything like the rate prevailing in the times of their forefathers or as now prevailing among the foreign-born, there remains a serious doubt as to whether such conclusions, resting upon fragmentary data, are properly applicable to the nation as a whole.

In brief, the American white population, according to the last Census, consists, in round figures, of forty-one million native-born of native parents, five million of mixed parentage and twenty-one million of foreign parentage. Since 1900, however, more than five million immigrants have arrived, mostly from Southern Europe. The problem which confronts the nation is the question of the rate of *natural* increase, or, in other words, the normal excess of births over deaths, in each of these elements, and the physical, moral and mental resultant of intermarriage of like or unlike ethnic elements. It is a question which demands an answer, and for which the responsibility rests with the nation;

and it lies within the power of the Federal Government alone to ascertain the facts.

It is only since 1890 that the Census reports have contained information as to the conjugal condition of the population. The Census Office has never published the exact data of the constituent parts of the American family, or, in other words, the number of children to a mother according to duration of marriage, and the proportion of married women without issue. Such information is obtainable for most of the other civilized countries; but, while the facts have been collected by the Census, at least since 1890, the data have not been published and the truth remains unknown.

It is not necessary to emphasize further the importance of the data required for an authoritative expression of opinion upon the problem stated. This much, however, may be said without an undue enlargement of the statistical side of the question, that by the last Census the number of married women of native white parents was 7,262,000 against 2,215,000 native-born of foreign parents, and 2,860,000 of foreign birth. In other words, against a little over seven million native white married women there are about five million either wholly or in part of foreign extraction. It requires no extended knowledge of the laws of human increase to make it clear that, if the rate of reproduction is materially higher among the foreign element than among the native, under the conditions pointed out, it is only a question of a comparatively short period of time when the actual *natural* increase of the foreign element will be considerably in excess of the actual number of births of native mothers of native stock. When, in addition, it can be shown that the proportion of married women of child-bearing ages is less among the native-born of native stock than among the foreign element the seriousness of the problem is further emphasized.

If, for illustration, we take the age period 25-29, we find that among the native white population of native stock 71.8 per cent. of the women are married, against 72.6 per cent. of the foreign; but the proportion of native married women at this age period has decreased since 1890, while for the foreign-born the proportion remained the same. At ages 30-34 the proportion of married women was 79.7 per cent. for the native, against 83.1 per cent. for the foreign. And here again, while the proportion

among the natives has decreased since 1890, the proportion for the foreign has remained the same. These differences may appear slight, but they are extremely significant, and more so when considered in connection with the decidedly higher birth rate among the elements of undesirable foreign extraction. For the present purpose, it is sufficient to use a birth rate based upon the number of women of ages 15-44, and, for my illustration, the data for Massachusetts for the five years ending with 1905. The data prove that there were 63 births per 1,000 women at this age period among the native, against 143 among the foreign. If these rates are contrasted with the five years following the close of the Civil War, it appears that the native birth rate at that time was 71 per 1,000, against 146 for the foreign-born. In other words, there has been a very decided decrease in the birth rate of native women in the State which prides itself most upon the question of pure ancestry, while there has been a comparatively stationary condition in this respect among the foreign element in the same State.

The available statistics for Rhode Island and New Hampshire indicate almost identical conditions and tendencies. The recently published returns of the State Census of Rhode Island for 1905 are, in fact, of a most startling character, challenging the attention of the nation. According to this official investigation, of the native-born women 15 to 45 years of age, 71.6 per cent. were married, compared with 82.5 per cent. for the foreign-born. Among the native-born women of this age period, 28.4 per cent. were childless, against 17.5 per cent for the foreign-born. The average number of children to a native-born married woman was 2.06, against 3.35 for the foreign-born. In 1885, according to the census for the same State, the average number of children to a native-born married woman was 3.49, against 2.06 for 1905; while during the same period, among the foreign-born women, the average number of children declined from 5.38 in 1885 to 3.35 in 1905. Among the native-born married women, ages 15 to 45, the proportion having only one child was 23.4 per cent. of the total, against 16.4 per cent. for the foreign-born. The proportion having over three children was only 19.8 per cent. for the native-born married women, against 38.7 per cent. for the foreign-born. At age 25 the proportion of childless native-born married women was 39.0 per cent., against

25.6 per cent. for the foreign-born. At age 30 the proportion of childless native married women was 29.1 per cent., against 15.9 per cent. for the foreign-born. It requires no additional statistical evidence to prove the seriousness of a problem which strikes at the root of American life and character.*

There are no corresponding statistical data for other American States useful for the present purpose, but as a general proposition it will hold true that the absolute and relative fecundity of the native-born element is less throughout the country than that of the foreign-born. There are differences, of course, in the degree of fecundity, and fortunately the native birth rate is still comparatively normal in the Southern and Western States; but there can be no doubt that throughout the country the foreign element is reproducing itself much more rapidly than the native, with probably four generations to a century, against less than three among the natives. If, however, for the sake of argument, we assume that the difference in the birth rate is the same, then *the actual deficiency in the annual number of births of native-born women of native stock will approximately amount to more than one and a quarter million.* In other words, the actual deficiency in the numerical increase of the native population is about the same as the present annual influx of foreigners, mostly from the Southern States of Europe. The late Francis A. Walker was one of the few who realized the significance of a declining birth rate in its bearing upon the problem of over-immigration, and he very ably pointed out that the gain by immigration had resulted in a replacement of native by foreign elements, and that if there had been no foreign immigration within the last half-century we would to-day have about the same population, or more, consisting wholly, or largely, of native-born of native stock.

There is a vast amount of misleading argument respecting race assimilation in this country. In fact, there has never been much assimilation, and it is not likely that there ever will be. Most of all will this prove true in the future in view of the vast immigration of totally unlike types during the last decade. The

* The startling results of the Rhode Island census are fully confirmed by an original investigation into the facts of American ancestry derived from published genealogies of American families, according to which the average number of children has diminished from nearly seven during the first half of the eighteenth century, to nearly five during the first half of the nineteenth century, and to less than three during the last half of the nineteenth century.

analysis of the Census upon this point is incomplete and, to a certain extent, misleading. Neither in this country nor in Europe is one well-defined racial type assimilating another. Neither are the Norwegians assimilated by the Swedes, nor the Portuguese by the Spaniards, nor the Dutch by the Germans, regardless of the fact that they have lived side by side for centuries. In Switzerland the French, German and Italian elements remain racially distinct, and the same is true of the Mexicans in Texas and of the French Canadians in Canada. The small amount of actual intermarriage has no appreciable effect in the development of new racial types in the United States. The acquisition of the English language, a fair degree of conformity to manners and usages, a reasonable compliance with law and custom, do not at all imply or constitute racial and political assimilation.

The earlier population estimates of a century in advance by Wigglesworth, Darby and others, for the year 1900, exceed the actual population as returned by the Census, regardless of the enormous immigration in the mean time. These estimates were based upon the assumption that the then prevailing rate of reproduction among the native element would continue. The difference is readily accounted for in the material diminution in the rate of increase among the native-born of native stock. That such a decline has taken place is not denied by any one familiar with the facts. That the reduction in the birth rate has been due to a decline in reproductive power is extremely doubtful. There remains, then, only one other explanation, and that is the truly momentous conclusion that the decline in the birth rate of native-born of native stock is deliberate, or the result of preventive checks, all more or less immoral or unnatural, as the case may be. It would be impossible to frame a more terrible indictment of what we generally speak of as the best element, but it is time the truth were told and realized before it is too late.

That the low birth rate among American women is deliberate and not the result of a decline in reproductive power every experienced physician will readily admit; and of the truth of the statement every intelligent person is well aware. While it is true that a decline in the birth rate is more or less general throughout the world, at least among the educated and prosperous elements of the population, the fact of a vice being general is no excuse for its being condoned. That the decline is the result of

a gradual spread of immoral doctrines, resting upon the theory of self-indulgence of the leisure class, can easily be confirmed by a study of the periodical literature of the last thirty years. Some years ago in this REVIEW Ida Husted Harper, a strenuous advocate of Woman's Rights, came out plainly and emphatically in a statement to the effect that "intelligent people have learned that it is easily possible to regulate the size of the family without injury to health or morals, and they *will* regulate it. The knowledge has proven the greatest of blessings to women." And this monstrous advice of a deliberate crime stands unchallenged and without protest as a sorry reflection upon American manners and morals at the beginning of the twentieth century. The article attracted the attention of a "Yale graduate of 1869," who, in a letter to the New York "Evening Post," indulged in the hope that some philanthropist would hand him a hundred thousand dollars to be used for the printing and distribution of these views to every pair of people whose marriage was announced in American newspapers. He concluded, therefore, that, "It is only the shiftless, the improvident and the dissolute who will point with pride to the President of the United States as a guide, philosopher and friend, who justifies them in adding to the vast number of people who ought never to have been born." Language like this from a Yale graduate must make one question the mental and moral value of university instruction. Who ought never to have been born? Simply because a child is the sixth, or seventh, or eighth, or ninth, should it never have been born? What evidence had the "Yale graduate of 1869" to prove that first-born children, or only children, represent the highest and most useful type? What evidence had he to prove that mothers of only children, or married women with no children, are morally and physically superior to those who conform to the laws of a moral society, the laws of nature and the laws of God? If this gospel of selfishness and immorality had been preached and generally followed by past generations many of our foremost leaders of thought and action would never have seen the light of day. Ought never to have been born! No doubt this might have been said at the outset, with at least some pretence to morals, in the case of the Russian woman who had already given birth to sixteen children and was anticipating the birth of the seventeenth. But who would have said this in later years, when Dmitri Ivanovitch

Mendeleeff, born February 7th, 1834, at Tobolsk, in Siberia—no doubt, under social and economic conditions more or less unfavorable—became one of the foremost minds in chemistry? His works have been translated in repeated editions in the English and German languages for the instruction of the world, and his "periodic law" will endure in chemistry as certainly as the law of gravitation in physical science.

The duty of maternity may impose heavy burdens and responsibilities, but it is one which no normally married woman can shirk, save at the risk of bodily and moral ruin. Audubon, the naturalist, was the twenty-first child, and Daniel Webster was the seventh, and so frail at birth that his life was despaired of. The mother of Benjamin Franklin was the ninth child, born under conditions of adversity on the island of Nantucket—fortunately the women of that period were of a different type and lived their lives in a natural manner, being compensated with more true happiness and self-realization than the childless women of to-day in the midst of plenty.

According to an extremely suggestive and original investigation by Dr. Louise G. Rabinovitch, of New York, into the "Genesis of Genius," as quoted in the "Medical Record," comparatively few men of genius have been the first-born of their parents; in fact:

"Not only were these men of genius not the first-born, in a very large number of cases they were the youngest or next to the youngest of the family. Thus Coleridge was the last of thirteen children, James Fenimore Cooper was the eleventh of twelve children, Washington Irving was the last of eleven, Balzac the last of three, George Eliot the last of four, Napoleon was the eighth, and probably the last; Daniel Webster the last of seven, Benjamin Franklin was the last of seventeen, and the last born of the last born for several generations; Rembrandt was the last of six children, Rubens the last of seven, Sir Edwin Landseer the fifth of seven children; Joshua Reynolds was the seventh child of his parents, Carl Maria Weber the ninth, Richard Wagner the last of seven, Mozart the last of seven, Schumann the last of five, Schubert the thirteenth of fourteen."

What a miserable philosophy of living and dying there is embodied in the shameless suggestion of immoral doctrines by those who by education and social status should be immeasurably the moral superiors of those who live in the slums.

There is no moral justification whatever for a deliberate limitation of the family, nor is there anything in the argument of the neo-malthusian drawn from economics. The very fact of a con-

stant and large immigration contradicts every argument in favor of a limitation of the family of the native-born of native stock. It is not, however, among the very poor, who might possibly be justified in limiting the family, that such doctrines hold sway. It is among the prosperous and the rich that we find the "no-child" or "one-child" theory defended, even by young wives of supposed innocence, with every prospect of material well-being and abundant resources for the more than necessary maintenance of a normal family. Only children, or only boys and girls, seldom represent a superior and successful type. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, but the evidence upon this point is conclusively summed up by E. W. Bohannon, who holds that:

"These only children are unmistakably below the average in health and vitality. Mental and physical defects of a grave character are much more common among them than among children generally. Their success in school work is below the average. A large number of them do not have as good command of themselves socially as does the average child. Their social relations are, therefore, more frequently characterized by friction. Selfishness is the most frequently named of the worst traits, while affection is most often named among the best traits. As a rule, the home treatment had been that of unthinking indulgence, which generally develops in a child the habit of expecting concessions on all sides, and corresponding unwillingness on his own part to make them to others. A right appreciation of the conditions with which the child must be concerned outside the family life requires that he be given ample opportunity for companionship with children of corresponding ages."

To this I may add the observation of a French writer, Arsene Dumont, who has said that "the life of an only child is an uninterrupted lesson in egoism lasting twenty years. Honor and country ask for sacrifices, and the 'only' child is less courageous. The more numerous the family, the more respectful the children are to the parents. Men from large families have greater social worth." Nor is the effect of the childless marriage, or of the deliberate limitation of the family, without most serious consequences upon the parents themselves. The evidence furnished upon this point, which is largely medical, is so conclusive that it may be stated as an axiom that the consequences upon the parents will, in most cases, in the course of years be disastrous. Married women live longer than the unmarried, and married women with children live longer and healthier lives than those who are without issue.

I need not discuss at length the argument that the mission of

educated women is not one of domestic drudgery and child-bearing, but for other ends and purposes. As it has been very beautifully said by Augustine, "As the soul is made for God and is not happy until it finds rest in Him, so woman's body and soul are made for maternity and she can never find true repose for either without it," and as said by Stanley Hall, "All ripe, healthy and womanly women desire this, and if they attain it through self-knowledge confess it to themselves, however loath they may be to do so to others, and some who attain it too late wear their lives out in regret." If the fecundity of native women as a class is very considerably below that of the women of foreign birth, the condition is still more deplorable among educated women, and in particular among those who are graduates of higher institutions of learning. Among others, for illustration, of Vassar graduates during the ten years ending with 1896 only 28 per cent. were married by 1903, with an average number of children of 1.6 per mother, while a considerable number were without issue. The results of other colleges are practically the same, and in all cases the percentage of married women is less, the age at marriage is more advanced, the number of children is small and large families are the rare exception. According to Dewey, quoted by Stanley Hall, 37 per cent. of married college graduates had no children, although the average number of years of married life was over six. Hall concludes that "from the knowledge at hand, it is plain that our race would be speedily extinct if it depended upon the rate of replenishment of the educated classes."

A thoroughly scientific investigation into the decline of the birth rate was made in New South Wales a few years ago, and a most valuable report was presented. The evidence itself was of such a scandalous and shocking nature that the Commonwealth has not dared to print it. There is no reason to suppose that the conditions in this country are in any way much better, if they are not decidedly worse. In explaining the immediate causes of the decline of the birth rate, the Commission sums up its conclusion as follows:

"There is a remarkable unanimity of opinion among the medical men, who are perhaps better able to judge than any other persons in a community, that deliberate interference with the function of procreation has during recent years been extremely common. We learn also from their evidence that the means used to effect the end desired are both

deleterious to general health in numerous instances, and frequently bring about such temporary and even permanent disability of the reproductive organs of women as creates forms of pathological sterility. They also tell us of the great and growing frequency of the occurrences of induced miscarriages and of the terrible destruction of reproductive capacity and wreckage of health and life which ensue."

The Commission, therefore, emphatically gave its endorsement to the view that the decline in the birth rate was the result of deliberate prevention or destruction of embryonic life, and they held that, to the contrary, there was no evidence of an actual increase in the physiological sterility among the women of New South Wales. They further held that the decline in the birth rate could not, in their opinion, be traced to any well-defined economic cause, but that, to the contrary, the practice prevailed among all classes, *except the very poor*. As to the moral and physiological consequences of preventive checks upon the population, they quote a high medical and surgical authority to the effect that, "Can any one, accustomed to treating the diseases of women, say in truth the statement is exaggerated that we can see on any one day more sorrow and misery resulting from the abuse of the married state than would be found in a month from uncomplicated child-bearing?"

The Commission concluded that:

"The mental condition of any population, moreover, in which the avoidance of parentage is condoned, and even advocated, we regard as one which tells its own tale of social and moral deterioration. Such practices as are necessarily resorted to as alternatives for that restraint of natural impulse, which is alone justifiable for this end, we agree with the reverend witnesses whose evidence we have quoted, violate the sanctity of marriage and tend to convert the marriage contract into a sexual compact. We consider that they lower the standard of right living and right thinking in the community, create laxity of morals, debase character and ignore the sanctity of human life."

And further that:

"The decay of family life is another feature involved in the disappearance of that sense of responsibility by which alone the recruiting of posterity can be maintained. The benefits of large families to the members of those families and to the nation composed of them cannot be overestimated. It is recognized that members of large families educate one another; that 'only' children and members of small families are less well equipped for the struggle of life; that they do not grow up to be morally, intellectually or physically superior to members of large families, while their social efficiency is impaired by selfishness."

It hardly seems necessary to add anything to this summary of scientific opinion courageously expressed and abundantly sustained by indisputable facts. Even more recently, however, another scientific investigation into this subject has been made by David Herron, M.A., "On the Relation of Fertility in Man to Social Status, and on the Changes in this Relation which Have Taken Place During the Last Fifty Years." Mr. Herron concludes that:

"As far as the present investigation goes, it demonstrates, I think conclusively, that for the London districts there is a very close relationship between undesirable social status and a high birth rate. In districts where there is overcrowding, where there is a superabundance of the lowest type of labor, where it is needful to employ many young children in order to earn daily bread for the family, where infantile mortality is greatest, there the wives of productive ages have most children. *Where there is more culture and education as shown by a higher proportion of professional men, where there is more leisure and comfort as shown by a higher percentage of domestic servants, where the traders who appeal to the improvident and thriftless are fewer in number, there the birth rate is least.*"* Again, where there is more general pauperism, where signs of bad environment like phthisis are prevalent, where pauper lunatics are most plentiful, there the birth rate is highest. . . . Nor is the higher birth rate of the undesirable elements compensated by the higher death rate. The net fertility of the lower status remains higher than that of the superior status. . . . The relationship between inferior status and high birth rate has practically doubled during the last fifty years, and it is clear that in London at least *the reduction in the size of families has begun at the wrong end of the social scale and is increasing in the wrong way.* I have brought forward evidence enough to show that the birth rate of the abler and more capable stocks is decreasing relatively to the mentally and physically feeble stocks."

The subject with special reference to the United States has also been investigated by Dr. Arthur Newsholme, a leading authority on vital statistics, who, in an address before the Royal Statistical Society on the Decline of Human Fertility, remarks that: "It is evident, then, that taking into consideration the probable understatement of the facts (due to imperfect registration,) the condition of voluntary prevention of child-bearing in the native population of Rhode Island and Boston has gone far beyond that reached by Paris."

There can be no question of doubt that children born of cul-

* The italics are mine.

tured ancestry have a decided advantage over those born of the less developed types. If it takes six or eight generations to fix character in a thoroughbred horse or dog, it is nothing short of a social crime to extinguish human traits and characteristics which have been acquired by ages of struggle and endeavor. Nesbit makes the startling assertion that "men derive their characteristics from an ancestry spread out fanlike over some three hundred years and numbering perhaps two thousand inhabitants." If this is true the best traits and characteristics of the American people, transmitted as the result of more than two hundred and fifty years of an active struggle for the realization of high moral and political ideas, are in a fair way of becoming extinct in consequence of a declining birth rate. As Stanley Hall has well said, "Each generation ought to add a little, infinitesimal though it be, to progress in that most ancient form of wealth and worth which work bestows." And upon this ground a deliberate interference with normal fecundity deserves unqualified condemnation by all who have the best interest of the nation at heart.

It is not that this subject is new, or that it has not been brought to public attention from time to time. Again and again the voice of warning has been raised, and even more than forty years ago Dr. Nathan Allen, of Lowell, Massachusetts, compared the decline in the birth rate with the deterioration of the once powerful and highly cultured races of antiquity. Engelman, as the result of his analysis of New England genealogies, shows that while in 1800 the average number of children was 6.1, it had decreased to 4.6 by 1830, to 3.3 by 1860, to 2.5 by 1872, and for the upper classes of Boston to 1.8 by 1900. Allen quotes from the works of Professor J. R. Seeley, the author of "*Ecce Homo*," in explanation of the decline of Rome, that "some principle of decay must clearly have been at work," and he answers, "It was a period of sterility, or barrenness, among human beings; the human harvest was bad." And in the declining days of Greece marriages were rare and unfruitful through the prevailing indifference or aversion to marriage and an unwillingness to raise up children arising from an extravagantly high standard of comfort. Allen calls attention to another class of facts connected with the history of Greece and Rome, which has its parallel, in some respects, in our own history. "Both these nations were more or less filled up with the transfer of immigration of peoples

from other countries" and "this foreign or barbarian element was much more prolific than were the native inhabitants of these two nations, nor was there a mixing up, or intermarriage, to much extent between the two classes. As a natural consequence, the purely native stock declined relatively in numbers, fading gradually away; and not only were they finally outnumbered, but they were overpowered both in war and in every department of government, as well as of society."

The foregoing extracts, to which much more of a similar nature could be added, warrant the suggestion made at the outset that it is time for the nation to realize the pressing need of a qualified and thorough investigation of this momentous question affecting our national progress and future position. In England an extended and able investigation has been made into this subject by a Special Committee on National Deterioration, and an investigation along similar lines is required for the United States. As Mr. Herron has pointed out, the facts disclosed by his researches indicate distinct sources of national deterioration, "which the statesman and social reformer must be prepared to consider and consider well." This is not a subject upon which any one should write or reason lightly, for it is one which goes into the very heart of the whole question of national well-being and national welfare. As the Royal Commission of New South Wales very properly say in their admirable presentation of the facts, "Patriotism dictates that the people of to-day should consider what these facts mean to the future. It is the duty of the present generation of Australians to see to it that their patriotism is not impugned in time to come; and that the loss of this fair heritage of the British race, which, under existing conditions the philosophy of history foretells, is not made attributable to them by those who may, in the days to come, have to sacrifice their blood and treasure in the vain hope of defending it." What is true of Australia is even more true of these United States, but the duty is even greater in view of the larger interest at stake.

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